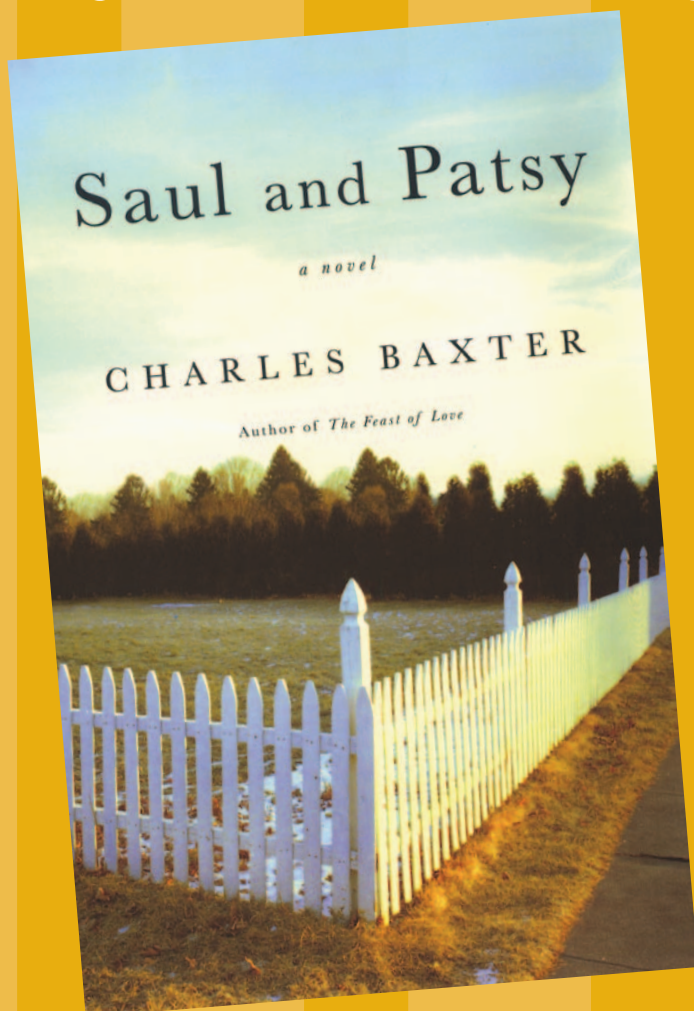


January 19 – April 23, 2004
Everyone's Reading...



Reader's Guide

Baldwin Public Library

Bloomfield Township
Public Library

Canton Public Library

Farmington Community
Library

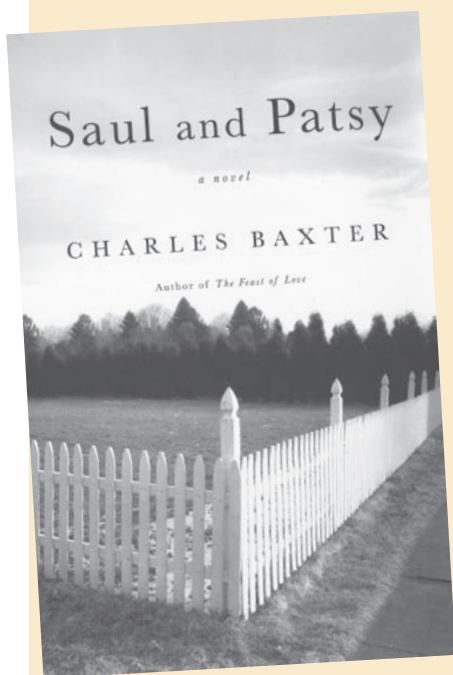
Independence Township
Library

Rochester Hills
Public Library

West Bloomfield Township
Public Library

What is “Everyone’s Reading... Saul and Patsy”?

“Everyone’s Reading” is a community-wide reading event sponsored by seven Metro Detroit public libraries. Similar to the “One Book, One Community” programs across the country, “Everyone’s Reading” promotes reading and discussion by encouraging an entire community to read the same book at the same time.



About the book

In the two years since they married and moved to the small city of Five Oaks, Michigan, nothing has mattered so much to either Saul or Patsy as the fact that they are just that: Saul-and-Patsy. Yes, Saul does feel envious of the attention Patsy lavishes on their new daughter, but his own attention is being drawn away from home by a different child: one of his students, a troubled sixteen-year-old boy, has become obsessed with Saul’s life. And although Saul can’t see it coming, the outcome of the boy’s obsession will lead Saul to question everything he has always assumed about himself - and about Saul-and-Patsy.

Previous “Everyone’s Reading” selections:

2002 – *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde

2003 – *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines

Why did we choose *Saul and Patsy* by Charles Baxter?

Saul and Patsy is set in the fictional small town of Five Oaks, Michigan. Charles Baxter, a highly acclaimed author and native Midwesterner, has set much of his writing in Michigan, where he lived for almost 30 years before moving back to his native Minnesota in 2003. Baxter is known for his solid, ordinary Midwestern characters, whose orderly lives are disrupted by accident or a simple encounter with a stranger. The title characters of this novel and the young adults with whom they come into tragic contact are people who could live next door to us - and they have something to tell us that goes far beyond wherever it is we are living.

How can I participate in “Everyone’s Reading *Saul and Patsy*”?

READ THE BOOK

Pick up a copy at one of the many participating public libraries, or purchase your own copy at a 20% discount at participating Borders bookstores.

DISCUSS IT

Use this Reader’s Guide to lead your own book discussion or attend one of the special “Everyone’s Reading” events listed in this guide and at www.everyonesreading.info.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Charles Baxter will speak and sign books on:

Thursday, April 22 at 7:30 PM

Bloomfield Township Public Library

Friday, April 23 at 3 PM

Rochester Hills Public Library

Booktalks

Listen to a review of *Saul and Patsy* and join in a discussion about the book and its author.

Daytime Book Discussion Group will discuss
Saul and Patsy

Thursday, February 5 from 10 - 11:30 AM
Independence Township Library
Community Meeting Room
Everyone is welcome.

Maureen Dunphy, from Oakland University,
will lecture and discuss *Saul and Patsy* and
other writings by Charles Baxter.

Tuesday, February 17 from 7 - 8:30 PM
Rochester Hills Public Library
Call (248) 650-7150 to register.

Hooked on Books book discussion group

Thursday, February 19 at 7 PM
Farmington Community Library
32737 West Twelve Mile Road
Registration requested: (248) 553-0300

"Between the Lines" book discussion group

Wednesday, February 25 from 10-11:30 AM
Rochester Hills Public Library
*Between the Lines book discussions are limited
to residents; please call (248) 650-7150 to
register.*

Costick Center Book Discussion

Thursday, March 4 at 1 PM
Costick Center
28600 West 11 Mile Road, Farmington Hills
Registration requested: (248) 553-0300

Reading Between the Lines book discussion
of *Saul and Patsy*

March 9 at 10 AM and March 11 at 7:30 PM
West Bloomfield Township Public Library

Wednesday Afternoon Book Group will
discuss *Saul and Patsy*

Wednesday, March 10 at 2 PM
Baldwin Public Library

Cover to Cover book groups will discuss
Saul and Patsy

Thursday, March 11 at 10 AM
Thursday, March 18 at 7:30 PM
Bloomfield Township Public Library
*Please register in person or by calling the library
at (248) 642-5800*

Evening Book Discussion Group will discuss
Saul and Patsy

Tuesday, March 16 from 7:30 - 9 PM
Independence Township Library
Youth Activities Room.
Everyone is welcome.

"Lunch and a Book" discussion of
Saul and Patsy

Thursday, March 25 from Noon to 1 PM
Canton Public Library

"Between the Lines" book discussion group

Thursday, March 25 from 1:30 - 3 PM
Rochester Hills Public Library
*Between the Lines book discussions are limited
to residents; please call (248) 650-7150 to
register.*

Dr. Ross Pudaloff, from Wayne State
University, will speak on "Charles Baxter,
Midwestern Writer."

Thursday, April 8 at 7:30 PM
Baldwin Public Library

Book discussion

Monday, April 12 at 7 PM
Northville District Library

Dr. Richard Sax, from Madonna University,
will speak on *Saul and Patsy*. (Thursday
Evening Book Group to attend program
in lieu of regularly scheduled meeting.)

Thursday, April 15 at 7:30 PM
Baldwin Public Library

Rachel W. Jacobsohn, noted book group
facilitator and author, will talk
about two Charles Baxter novels, *Saul and
Patsy* and *Feast of Love*.

Thursday, April 15 from 7 - 9 PM
Canton Public Library
Call 734 397-0999 to register

Popular Book Discussion

Thursday, April 22 at 10AM
Farmington Branch Library
23500 Liberty, Farmington
Registration requested: (248) 553-0300



Biography of Charles Baxter

Charles Baxter is best known for his ability to reveal the extraordinary in the world of ordinary people and relationships. His characters have a wide range of obsessions, occupations and dilemmas, which he renders with intelligence and compassion. Although sometimes labeled a “Midwestern writer,” the themes and messages he intertwines with the settings of his fiction have broad application.

Baxter, originally from Minnesota, began his career as a schoolteacher in rural Michigan, moonlighting as a poet. He was published for the first time in 1974, and not long after, tried his hand at writing fiction and completed three novels – none of which were published. Realizing that he didn’t know how to write fiction, he began writing short stories to cultivate his art. “It was a long apprenticeship,” he says. Baxter’s first book of stories, *Harmony of the World*, was published in 1984, and since then he has had six additional works of fiction published, including three novels – *First Light*, *Shadow Play* and *The Feast of Love* – and three collections of short stories – *A Relative Stranger*, *Believers* and *Through the Safety Net*. He has also published a collection of poetry, *Imaginary Paintings*, and essays entitled *Burning Down the Houses*.

In addition to being nominated for the 2000 National Book Award for Fiction, *The Feast of Love* won the Prix de St. Valentine in its French translation, and the Catalan Booksellers Association Award as book of the year in Spain. Baxter is also the recipient of the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

After nearly 30 years in Ann Arbor, Baxter now resides in Minneapolis and teaches at the University of Minnesota as the Edelstein-Keller Professor of Creative Writing. He formerly taught at the University of Michigan, Wayne State University and in the MFA Program at Warren Wilson College.

Discussion Questions

Here are questions that can be used to enrich your discussion and understanding of *Saul and Patsy*.

- 1.** How does the town of Five Oaks, Michigan figure as a character in the novel? How is it a particularly Midwestern town? How do the various town folk – whom Saul refers to as “rural Gentiles, connoisseurs of rifles, violence, and piety” – play into the narrative? Consider Harold the barber, the local high school teachers and students, Mrs. O’Neil the lonely neighbor, the various students, Susan the bank teller, and Gordy’s Aunt Brenda.
- 2.** Saul and Patsy are definitely outsiders in this small Midwestern town. What sets Saul apart from the other inhabitants? Does his Jewishness play a role, or is this largely in Saul’s imagination? By the end, are they Midwesterners as well?
- 3.** Saul views himself as a missionary, “bringing education and the higher enlightenments to rural benighted adolescents.” What exactly is a missionary? Do you think Saul is one? Later in the novel when asked if he is going to stay in the Midwest, Saul responds, “I have to. I’m on a mission. We are.” What is this mission? Is it ultimately to save himself or others? And from what?
- 4.** How does having a child transform Saul and Patsy’s life? Do they change individually and/or as a couple? What do they learn about each other in the process of accepting a third person into their world, and growing from a couple into a family?
- 5.** After meeting the McPhees, Saul “began to be obsessed with happiness” and realized “compared to others, he was, except for his marriage, actually and truly unhappy.” He becomes preoccupied with the McPhees and their happiness without really knowing much about their lives. Why the jealousy and obsession?

6. *Saul and Patsy* overflows with references to written words. Saul teaches writing at the local high school and later writes a newspaper column. Saul and Patsy adore Scrabble and crossword puzzles. Various authors are referred to and quoted. Saul writes on Patsy's body. Gordy leaves notes for Saul. What is the importance of the written word in the novel? Give examples of the success and the failure of words in the novel.

7. Discuss the theme of betrayal in *Saul and Patsy*. What types of betrayal occur? What are the causes and consequences of them? Are the betrayals justified? Is anyone innocent? As a teacher, does Saul betray Gordy? As a brother, does Howie betray Saul? Does Patsy betray Delia?

8. Does Gordy Himmelman represent or symbolize something larger than himself, a troubled teen, to Saul and to the novel as a whole? What? Why is he obsessed with Saul, and why does he commit suicide?

9. What does Saul learn about himself and his relationship with Patsy and his family through his experiences with Gordy? Through his experiences in Five Oaks? What does Patsy learn?

10. Why do you think the adolescents of Five Oaks react the way they do after Gordy Himmelman's death? Is it indicative of Five Oaks, the Midwest, and our society as a whole? Do you think the reaction is realistic?

11. Discuss the role and importance of the media and television in the novel. Is the author making a social commentary on the media and its omnipresence?

12. At various points throughout *Saul and Patsy*, characters invade other characters' privacy. Give some specific instances of characters trespassing or spying on other characters. What is really going on in these situations?

13. What about Howie? How were he and Saul the same or different? Why was Howie even in the story? What purpose did he serve?

14. Discuss the significance of the conclusion. Why does the novel end this way? What do you think is in the future for Saul and Patsy?

Reprinted with permission of Random House

Interview With Charles Baxter

Charles Baxter answered the following questions especially for readers involved in the “Everyone’s Reading” program.

“Some reviewers have called *Saul and Patsy* a novel about marriage or the Midwest or anti-Semitism. How do you describe what the novel is about?”

Probably novels shouldn’t be boiled down to one subject or theme. Having said that, I’d probably say that *Saul and Patsy* is a novel about the feeling of being outside of happiness, looking in on it. Saul first feels that, looking at Anne and Emory McPhee, and then Gordy Himmelman feels that, looking at Saul and Patsy. This theme is then doubled, or tripled, with Howie, Saul’s brother, contemplating his brother and sister-in-law’s lives, and then all the underparented children arriving on Saul and Patsy’s doorstep. We rarely think that we are the object of envy for others. But sometimes, indeed, we are.

“You’ve used the fictional Five Oaks, Michigan as the setting for short stories in *Through the Safety Net* and *A Relative Stranger* and for parts of your novels *First Light* and *Shadow Play*. What is it about this setting that inspires you?”

It’s my own. I’ve created that town or city or community and can see in it and place there, the sorts of people and social situations and themes that I have accumulated and known in several different American towns and cities. It’s not remarkable for its beauty or power; it’s remarkable for being almost invisible. That’s why we need to look at it.

“The cover art of a number of your books (*Saul and Patsy*, *First Light*, *Shadow Play*, *Believers*, *Through the Safety Net* and *A Relative Stranger*) contains similar elements: outdoor scenes, no human figures, a lot of sky, picket fences (two book covers) and the perspective of someone standing out of the picture looking toward a focal point. What are these covers saying about your books?”

I don’t choose the cover art. But the art directors seem to be after a Hopper-esque effect, of the beauty of solitary contemplation, of American twilights – and finally the effect of someone looking toward a boundary line of some sort.

“When an interviewer asked you about Gordy Himmelman, the troubled teen character in *Saul and Patsy*, you said in your answer that, ‘There’s something in the air in American culture these days.’ What did you mean and how does it apply to this novel?”

What I meant was that Gordy Himmelman is an abandoned child who has been left more-or-less to his own devices. He’s been raised by a television set, not by a parent. He seems to be something of a blank, but he also yearns to be taken care of, though when care is offered to him, he doesn’t take it.

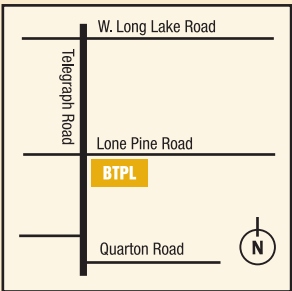
“What one thing would you like readers to keep in the back of their mind as they read *Saul and Patsy*?”

Keep the image in mind of someone standing outside of another person’s house – a house where that person imagines happiness is located – and trying to understand or to know what the content of that happiness is, and how to obtain it. The book is about the mystery of happiness, particularly mysterious to those who think they don’t have it.

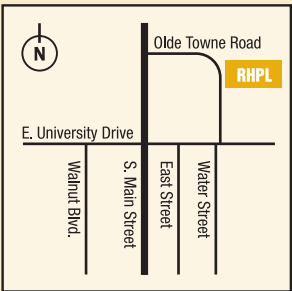
“Finally, who are some of your favorite contemporary American authors and which of their works would you recommend to readers here in Metro Detroit?”

Some authors off the beaten track: Paula Fox, *The Widow’s Children*; Edward P. Jones, *Lost in the City*; William Maxwell, *So Long, See You Tomorrow*; Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Blue Flower*; Evan S. Connell, *Mrs. Bridge*.

Be sure to see Charles Baxter on April 22 at the Bloomfield Township Public Library and on April 23 at the Rochester Hills Public Library and ask your own questions.



Thursday, April 22, 7:30 p.m.
Bloomfield Township Public Library
1099 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills
248-642-5800
No charge



Friday, April 23, 3:00 p.m.
Rochester Hills Public Library
500 Olde Towne Road, Rochester
248-650-7150
No charge

Other Works By Charles Baxter

***The Feast of Love.* 2000**

In a re-imagined *Midsummer Night's Dream*, men and women speak of and desire their ideal mates; parents seek out their lost children; adult children try to come to terms with their own parents; and in some cases, find new ones

***Believers.* 1997**

The seven stories and novella in *Believers* revel in the surfaces of seemingly ordinary characters while uncovering their bedrock of passion, madness, levity, and grief.

***Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction.* 1997**

Baxter displays his characteristic wit and intelligence in essays about the influences of culture and current events on the art of storytelling.

***Shadow Play.* 1993**

As his wife does gymnastics and magic tricks, his crazy mother invents her own vocabulary, and his aunt writes her own version of the Bible, Five Oaks Assistant City Manager Wyatt Palmer tries to live a normal life and nearly succeeds.

***A Relative Stranger: Stories.* 1990**

In *A Relative Stranger*, shock, comedy, and love combine in unexpected ways and in unexpected places to illuminate the tenuous connections between relatives and strangers.

***Imaginary Paintings: Poems.* 1989**

***First Light.* 1987**

First Light takes us backward through the lives of Hugh and Dorsey Welch, a brother and sister born and raised in a small Michigan town.

***Through the Safety Net: Stories.* 1985.**

Through the Safety Net dives into the undercurrents of middle-class America with eleven arresting, often mesmerizing stories.

Reprinted with permission of Charles Baxter.

Other Books With A Michigan Setting

Boyle, T. Coraghesson. *The Road to Wellville*. Fiction, 1993

An exuberant, hilarious satire that follows the strange career of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg of Battle Creek, America's first health and physical fitness guru. Turn-of-the-century Battle Creek, the capitol of breakfast cereals and health spas, is brought vividly to life.

Catton, Bruce. *Waiting for the Morning Train*. Nonfiction, 1972

The award-winning historian's warmly remembered story of growing up in Benzonia, Michigan around the turn of the century.

Hamper, Ben. *Rivethead*. Nonfiction, 1991

An irreverent, outrageous and wickedly funny autobiography of a Flint "shop rat." Although the author's experiences might not be typical of life-on-the-assembly-line, the book paints a vivid portrait of life in a factory town.

Harrison, Jim. *Farmer*. Fiction, 1996

An indelible, acutely visceral statement about growth, death and seasonal change played out in a rural Michigan setting.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Nick Adams Stories*. Fiction, 1972

Most of these interconnected short stories, by a master of American fiction, are set in northern Michigan just before and after World War I.

Holden, Craig. *The River Sorrow*. Fiction, 1994

Set in southern Michigan, reformed drug addict Dr. Adrian Lancaster is drawn into a maze of murder and betrayal, and is ultimately set up for crimes he has not committed.

Jager, Ronald. *Eighty Acres: Elegy for a Family Farm*. Nonfiction, 1990

A richly detailed memoir that evokes rural America of fifty years ago on a Dutch farm in western Michigan.

Kotlowitz, Alex. *The Other Side of the River: a Story of Two Towns, a Death, and America's Dilemma*. Nonfiction, 1998

The true story of two cities in southern Michigan (one white, one black) separated by a river. When the body of a youth from the black town is found floating in the river, the uproar that surrounds his mysterious death exposes the growing racial divide that haunts our nation.

Other Books With A Michigan Setting *(continued)*

Love, Edmund. ***The Situation in Flushing***. Nonfiction, 1965

An altogether charming, warm and humorous remembrance of growing up in small town America just past the turn of the century. Mr. Love captures perfectly a time and place that disappeared with the coming of the automobile age.

Mallon, Thomas. ***Dewey Defeats Truman***. Fiction, 1997.

The hopes, dreams, and buried secrets of the residents of Owosso, MI play out against the 1948 Presidential election, where native son Tom Dewey is heavily favored.

Piercy, Marge. ***Braided Lives***. Fiction, 1982

Set in Detroit, Ann Arbor and New York City, this accomplished and involving feminist novel traces the life, loves, successes and hardships of a woman writer.

Stocking, Kathleen. ***Letters from the Leelanau***. Nonfiction, 1990

A collection of penetrating and at times lyrical essays about people and places in Leelanau County.

Travers, Robert. ***Anatomy of a Murder***. Fiction, 1958

A gripping novel about a murder trial that also serves as a primer on the practice of law. A bestseller set in Marquette County, this book put the Upper Peninsula on the literary map.

Travers, Robert. ***Trout Madness***. Nonfiction, 1960

A joyous, glorious collection of stories about the passion, mania and love for trout fishing set in the Upper Peninsula. One of the handful of modern classics about fishing.

Select annotations reprinted from "Michigan Notable Books," courtesy of the Flint Public Library, Flint, MI.

Read-Alikes (Books with similar themes or plots.)

Anderson, Sherwood. ***Winesburg, Ohio***

Winesburg, Ohio depicts the strange, secret lives of the inhabitants of a small town.

Ansary Manette. ***Vinegar Hill***

Set in 1972, Ansary's debut novel revolves around Ellen Grier's struggle for liberation from her marriage, from her virtual enslavement to her sanctimonious, cruel in-laws, and from what she sees as the stultifying demands of her religion.

Bohjalian, Chris. ***Midwives***

An obstetrician, the daughter of a respected midwife from a rural Vermont community, recounts the summer of her thirteenth year, when her mother stood accused of murdering a woman during a difficult delivery.

Hamilton, Jane. ***Map of the World***

A vivid human drama of guilt and betrayal, *A Map of the World* chronicles the intricate geographies of the human heart and all its mysterious, uncharted terrain. The result is a piercing drama about family bonds and a disappearing rural American life.

Haruf, Kent. ***Plainsong***

An unlikely extended family is formed when a high school teacher helps a pregnant student make a home with two elderly bachelor ranchers.

Henley, Patricia. ***In the River Sweet***

Fifty-year-old Ruth Anne Bond finds her happy marriage, rich life and firm Catholic faith turned upside down when a secret that she has kept from her family for nearly thirty years is revealed by contact from her illegitimate son.

Munro, Alice. ***Open Secret***

In a collection of loosely related stories, Munro evokes the devastating power of old love suddenly recollected, in tales that resonate with sorrow, humor, and wisdom. Her heroines are often uneasy souls with the unforgiving task of fitting into the rigorously confining community that produced them.

Read-Alikes *(continued)*

Roth, Phillip. ***The Human Stain***

A college professor with a sexual indiscretion in his past is hounded from his job by academic enemies who label him a racist.

Russo, Richard. ***Empire Falls***

Like so many dying New England towns, Empire Falls is a mill town without a mill and middle-class townspeople with little work to do who are stuck.

Stegner, Wallace. ***Crossing to Safety***

Larry and Sally Morgan and Sid and Charity Lang met in 1937 at the Wisconsin university where both men taught. The two couples develop a lasting friendship that remains strong throughout their lives. Love and loyalty and the occasional penalties of closeness are examined in both relationships, as individual marriages and between the two couples.

Watson, Larry. ***Orchard: A Novel***

Sonja Skordahl, a Scandinavian immigrant, finds herself torn between her husband, Henry, and Ned Weaver, an internationally famous artist who uses her as a model, in a novel set against the backdrop of rural Wisconsin.

Resources for More Information on Charles Baxter and Saul and Patsy

Charles Baxter - www.charlesbaxter.com

“Charles (Morley) Baxter” Contemporary Authors Online.
Available online through Literature Resource Center.

“Charles Baxter” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 130: American Short-Story Writers Since World War II*. Detroit, MI: The Gale Group, 1993.
Available online through Literature Resource Center.

About Charles Baxter: A Profile
<http://www.pshares.org/issues/article.cfm?prmArticleID=4709>

A Son of the Middle Border
<http://www.umich.edu/~newsinfo/MT/97/Spr97/mta7s97.html>

An Interview with Charles Baxter
<http://thewag.net/baxterin.htm>

Desire Rules: Interview with Charles Baxter
<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/bookauth/baxtint.htm>

Charles Baxter Revisits Old Friends in Five Oaks
<http://www.powells.com/authors/baxter.html>

Eakin, Emily “Quiet Midwest Novelist is Making a Little Noise.”
New York Times, Sept. 4, 2003 p. E1.

This guide was prepared by:



Baldwin Public Library

www.baldwinlib.org

(248) 647-1700



Farmington Community Library

www.farmlib.org

(248) 553-0300



Bloomfield Township Public Library

www.btpl.org

(248) 642-5800



Independence Township Library

www.metronet.lib.mi.us/INDE/

(248) 625-2212



Canton Public Library

Canton Public Library

www.cantonpl.org

(734) 397-0999



Rochester Hills Public Library

Rochester Hills Public Library

www.rhpl.org

(248) 650-7150



West Bloomfield Township Public Library

www.wbplib.org

(248) 682-2120

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Discussion Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

Everyone's Reading... Saul and Patsy Reader's Guide

**This guide was prepared by
these Metro Net Libraries:**

Baldwin Public Library

www.baldwinlib.org • (248) 647-1700

Bloomfield Township Public Library

www.btpl.org • (248) 642-5800

Canton Public Library

www.cantonpl.org • (734) 397-0999

Farmington Community Library

www.farmlib.org • (248) 553-0300

Independence Township Library

www.metronet.lib.mi.us/INDE/ • (248) 625-2212

Rochester Hills Public Library

www.rhpl.org • (248) 650-7150

West Bloomfield Township Public Library

www.wbplib.org • (248) 682-2120

Other Participating Libraries:

Franklin Public Library

Brandon Township Public Library

Plymouth District Library

Milford Township Library

Northville District Library

Orion Township Public Library



Sponsored by the
Metro Net Library
Consortium of Michigan